

14. THE  
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IMPOSTURE  
DETECTED;

OR, THE  
MYSTERY and INIQUITY of  
Elizabeth Canning's  
Story, Displayed :

WHEREIN

Principles are laid down, and a method established, by which all impostures whatever, still prevailing in the world, may be detected; and all future ones for ever prevented from establishing themselves hereafter.

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L O N D O N :

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SEP 29 1915

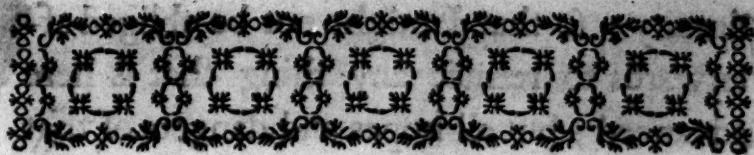
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THE  
IMPOSTURE  
DETECTED, &c.

THE reason why the publication  
of the following reflections on  
Miss CANNING's miraculous ad-  
ventures, has been deferred so long, is,  
that I wanted to see what further light  
might be thrown upon this mysterious af-  
fair, by the enquiries that I have heard  
were making into it, by persons sufficiently  
able to establish it past controversy if it is a  
truth, or detect it if an imposture, pro-  
vided either could be done by human tes-  
timony;

timony ; so that I might not be obliged afterwards to retract any thing that is here advanced ; but all hopes and dangers of that kind seem now to be for ever removed by the late verdict of the grand jury. My motive for publishing them now, is an honest and laudable design to prevent guilt and imposture, from entirely triumphing over truth and innocence ; to lay down principles, and shew a method, by which not only this, but all other impostures still prevailing in the world, may be detected ; and by that means to hinder any future ones from establishing themselves hereafter, and being hurtful and pernicious to mankind ; which will always be found their natural and necessary consequence.

IT is wrong in any man to indulge a sarcastic disposition, yet without danger of being justly charged with that, I cannot help imputing to the modern English, particularly the Londoners, a much greater share of gross credulity, than can be said to have possessed the ancient Greeks and Romans :

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The vulgar amongst these people, no doubt believed all the miracles and prodigies of their respective religions; but then they constantly assigned an adequate cause for them, the immediate interposition of their gods and superior beings; and when once such a belief is established, they cannot justly be blamed for giving credit to any miracle whatever, provided it does not carry a direct contradiction in itself; but the credulity of the English is inexcusable, for they believe the most absurd things imaginable, without having recourse to any supernatural interposition at all. The rabbit-woman, the adventure of the quart-bottle, and the migration of the Londoners to the fields, occasioned by the soldiers prophesying a third earthquake, are recent and notorious instances of this truth; however these, particularly the two last, were only sudden gusts and starts of credulity, of which no doubt my sagacious fellow-citizens were heartily ashamed, as soon as the fit was over; but this whole story of CANNING affords in my opinion, a most remarkable



able example not only of the grossest credulity, but of a settled, obstinate, mountain-removing faith, that makes light of all objections and improbabilities whatsoever.

AT the same time that the generality are credulous to the highest degree, numbers who would be thought to entertain sentiments, and opinions far above the low prejudices of the vulgar, are equally inconsistent with themselves: The growth of scepticism and infidelity, has been prodigious of late years, and is, no doubt, much to be lamented; I know some of those gentlemen who affect to distinguish themselves by the glorious name of *Free-thinkers*, to which they have no manner of title, and certainly there are many more, who reject as fabulous, the miraculous life and sufferings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as they are related in the four gospels, the most authentic and best attested histories that ever were wrote, and at the same time give an implicit faith, to this story of CANNING, the most improbable and

and inconnected legend that ever was contrived: It may be laid down as a first principle, that those who are inconsistent with themselves, can never think consistently with truth.

AFTER the most serious and impartial enquiry I have been able to make into this affair, I cannot help concluding the whole to be an infamous, as well as a villainous imposture: I shall here lay before the reader, with the utmost freedom and candor, the reasons which have obliged me finally to embrace this opinion. In the first place, it is not now supported by any testimony but that of the girl herself, a child in years as well as understanding; and every sober thinking man, would naturally require the strongest evidence human testimony could afford, before he would give his assent to a story so very improbable in all its circumstances: In the next place, her own champions, the Justice and the Surgeon, have injudiciously weakened even that evidence, by representing her so very simple

ple and silly ; perhaps they may have thus proved, what they seem only to have intended, that the story was not her own contrivance, but then the suspicion must be, that either her silliness and simplicity are such, that she has now deceived herself, and is by this time persuaded of its truth, or has been all along buoyed up in the assertion of it, by the madness and credulity of those that are about her. When she was carried before the Justice and her chocolate-house friends, unless we suppose her an idiot altogether, she must have easily perceived that they all wished to find her innocent, and that it would have given them pain, had she declared herself otherwise ; a principle of gratitude therefore to her benefactors, as well as self-preservation, would induce her to continue in her old story without variation ; and when men wish a thing, they are easily deceived by a person who flatters their wishes : But be this as it will, if she is so very simple as her champions represent her, my real opinion is, that she herself has long been persuaded



suaded of the truth of her story, and that she was not guilty of wilful perjury at the Old Baily; and on this principle, the late verdict of the Grand Jury may be justified: From the same principle, her composed and uniform behaviour, before such a tremendous man as the Justice, and such fine men as the great lords and squires, that frequent the Chocolate-house, may likewise fairly be accounted for.

BUT what weighs most with me, is this consideration, that I cannot help thinking her story is contradicted by the testimony of nature, and where no miraculous interposition is supposed, that must always overballance any human testimony whatever, especially so weak a one as her relation is supported by, and which is clogged with so many confessed improbabilities and inconsistencies besides, as they are fully set forth in Dr. Hill's pamphlet. The consequences of fasting, according to Dr. Dodd, are waste of flesh, costiveness, and livid blackness of the skin; according to Dr. Boerhaave,

Boerhaave, they are nausea, fainting fits, a craving canine appetite, an entire loss of it succeeding, an immense thirst, dryness and weakness, gripes and wind, an accumulation and vomiting of bile, waste of flesh, watchings, epilepsies, furious fevers, and death. Dr. Boerhaave gives reasons for his symptoms, Dr. Dodd gives none for his, and all acquainted with medicine, know that none can be given; and I hope that even Miss CANNING's friends will know so much as not to compare the authority and characters of the two Doctors: All indeed that I can learn from the surgeon's performance, is, that he knows nothing of his business, which to me, who never design to be his patient, is a truth of no consequence. It may be observed that costiveness and livid spots on the skin, are not mentioned at all, and that waste of flesh is amongst the last of Dr. Boerhaave's symptoms, as any one may see it naturally and necessarily must. Dr. Dodd informs us that Miss was a hearty girl, sanguine, and of a florid countenance; now any doctor but himself would have known

known that so hearty a girl must have been sooner and more strongly affected by hunger, than one that was less so ; one of Dr. Boerhaave's first symptoms, is a strong canine appetite, in which case, not only the minced pye, which she kept as a *corps de reserve*, for so the story goes, but the crusts of bread however unfavoury, must have been devoured at once : The next symptoms that occur, are a burning thirst and dryness, when the pitcher of water would certainly have shared the same fate ; such according to the greatest physician that ever lived, would have been the necessary conduct of a person in a starving condition ; but Miss CANNING acted in quite another manner, and husbanded her small allowance with a prudence, discretion and œconomy, not only above her years and understanding, but even above human nature, and possibility itself : However, this and much more than this, can be no objection with true, believing Canningan champions, *credideris nihil temere*, cries Dr. Dodd, *credo quia impossibile est*, an ancient father would have



said in the same case. Another very remarkable circumstance is, that this girl was very much subject to epileptic fits, especially when frightened, and accordingly says she was carried off in one, which is both very natural and probable; but then how came she not to fall into one when the gipsey took the stays from her, and threatened to cut her throat, or not to have one the whole time she was confined in the garret? This is alone sufficient to confute her story, for Boerhaave tells us, that both fainting and epileptic fits are the necessary consequences of being starved, and one naturally subject to them before, would much more readily fall into them then; in my opinion Miss CANNING is very much obliged to Mary Squires, for she seems to have cured her entirely of her convulsion fits. Were a Jewish author to give an account of this affair, according to the medicinal theory that flourished amongst his learned countrymen in ancient times, he would do it pretty much in this manner: "And a certain woman named Elizabeth had a devil, and

and a certain gipsy cast him out of her, and the devil went up into the great city, and entered into Justice Fielding, Dr. Dodd, the mob at White's chocolate-house, and the London mob in general, and they all went mad; and the chief magistrate being a wise man, endeavoured to drive the devil out of them, but they would not be healed; and they reviled him, and the thoughts of their hearts were evil against him; and they are all mad still."

I am well aware that there are undeniable instances of persons that have fasted much longer than our young lady is supposed to have done; but then these fastings were all the consequences of distempers, either of the body or mind, as appears plainly from Dr. Dodd's instances, though neither very well attested nor very well chosen, which was not the case with Miss, who was so hearty, so sanguine and florid when she was turned up to starve in the garret: Besides, in these people who have long wanted food, the animal functions go on

pretty much in the natural way, and they suffer little on that account, or else they could not subsist at all, but the contrary happened in this case, which shews that what symptoms were observed about her at her return, could not have been occasioned by long fasting. In Hoffman's works there is a very remarkable account of two women, who when under the cataleptic or prophetic distemper, fasted one of them five weeks, and the other fourteen days, and so far from being costive, the first, which was very extraordinary, *singulis diebus copiosa & valde dura alvo reddidit stercora*, in the other, *excreta omnia se bene habebant nec menses sui officii obliviscebantur*; neither of them lost their colour or their flesh, and when out of the fits their strength was very little impaired. I remember several other instances of this kind, in different authors, but not having them by me, cannot refer to them; during the time that these two women fasted, they saw visions, felt inspirations, and prophesied, which are always the natural symptoms of the Catalepsy, and their minds being



being employed that way, is the reason why they did not suffer from the want of nourishment. This distemper is reckoned by physicians, to be very rare, but that is a vulgar error, for it can be proved from the nature of things, and the similarity of symptoms, that all the extasies, visions, and trances of ancient and modern prophets, primitive and present christians, are nothing else but the effects of that distemper; that it is infectious and catching, and that it may be raised, propagated, and communicated by art and contivance; for which, such persons as Whitfield and Wesley, are very proper instruments \*. If then Miss CANNING, after her return, having none of these symptoms

\* It may not here be amiss to throw together some observations, confirming the truth of what I have above advanced. It is very remarkable, that J. Scott, Dr. Dodd's most celebrated faster, after having travelled to Italy, and starved a while at Rome, came to England, where he was seized with the distemper of preaching, near a-kin to that of prophesying, and mounting the rostrum at St. Paul's, harangued against the divorce of King Henry the eighth, which was then in agitation; on which account he was thrown into

toms about her, which Dr. Dodd so learnedly accounts for, had told her story in the same manner, with respect to her being carried off, robbed and confined, only with this variation, that during her imprisonment she was happy and entranced, and had

into prison, where we are told he fasted fifty days. Mr. Dionis, a famous French surgeon, in an appendix to his treatise on sudden deaths, gives a very circumstantial and extraordinary narrative of the case of a young lady, who all her life-time had been much addicted to pious meditations, and was afflicted with the Catalepsy for several months: At the beginning, she had few or no visions, neither did she prophesy, which seems to have been owing to the extreme violence of her fits, but after they abated, she began to pour forth prophecies in abundance, and see visions in great plenty; on which account she was lodged by the king's order in a monastery; after this we hear no more about her, only that she was perfectly cured in a short time. I have been told that Mr. George Whitefield, that renowned itinerant apostle, the last time he was in Scotland, sowed the seeds of prophecy in some parishes in the west, which, had they met with due encouragement from the pastors of the church, or a little seasonable persecution from the civil magistrate, in all probability would have produced a plentiful harvest, and a prophetic university might have been founded, which in time would have been

had been transported up into Heaven, and conversed with saints, angels, and blessed spirits, and that after she returned to earth, she had made her escape; had she told such a story, I confess I should have believed her; being convinced of this, that  
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as famous as the prophetical school which Samuel erected at Naioth. I never saw the printed accounts which were published, or any of the prophets themselves, but from what I can gather from those who have seen and observed both, it appears plain to me, that their ecstasies could be nothing else but cataleptic fits, and from the great numbers that were seized at that time, it is evident, that it is an infectious and contagious distemper.

I have read several popish legends, giving an account of the visions and ecstasies of their monks and nuns, and they all seem to be the symptoms of this disease. The doctrine of Quietism or Molinism, is plainly a regular medical receipt to bring on this cataleptic, ecstatic or prophetic distemper. How successfully it has been employed for that purpose, may be seen from the cases of Father Girard's devotees, that profane jesuit raised the unhappy Miss Cadiere's passion for him, as well as other enthusiastic ones, to a most extravagant height, by breathing on her: In the 20th chap. 22d ver. of St. John, we are told that our saviour after his resurrection, infused the Holy Ghost



from melancholy and confinement, naturally arise visions and trances, and that when under these, a person will easily endure the longest fasting. Had she come to town I say, and published a roll of prophecies, threatening a French invasion, or a third earth-

Ghost into his apostles, by breathing upon them. Hence it may be gathered, how very cautious we ought to be, in forming our judgment of things by their external appearances, when we see the wickedest of men, to bring about the most infamous ends, made use of the same means by which the holy Jesus qualified his apostles for spreading the light of the gospel through a dark and sinful world. There seems likewise to be a remarkable analogy between the revelations, and visions which Miss Cadiere had during Lent, 1730, and the revelations of St. John the evangelist, by which it may be seen, that these morbid ecstasies, may sometimes very nearly imitate the real inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

It is extremely remarkable, that before Miss Cadiere had any visions or ecstasies, she was ordered by her confessor to take the sacrament every day, and that after a while she had them frequently both in her chamber and the streets, and that soon after that the cataleptic fits came on, which were extremely violent, and gave that impious jesuit frequent opportunities of gratifying his brutal passion, on the insensible body of

earthquake; had that occasioned a second migration of the Londoners to the country, or a second pastoral letter, I should not have been much surprized; in such a case indeed, she could not have expected any friends at the Chocolate-house, possibly

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of his beautiful and unhappy penitent. From her case which is published in four volumes, it appears that this father had about six devotees all under the same management, and in the same situation; we are likewise told that Miss Cadiere fasted during the whole time of Lent, about forty days, and that when she offered to swallow any thing, it threw her into violent anxieties and convulsions, which is an ordinary symptom of the Catalepsy, as appears from Hoffman, Dionis, and other authors: This however is contradicted by the jesuit, who affirms, that she ate pies and pullets in private with another of his devotees, but that is altogether improbable, and the whole drift of the holy father in his defence, is to prove her an impostor, and that he himself was deceived by her.

IN the 109th and 110th pages of the first volume, we are informed that this young lady possessed in some degree, the gift of tongues, or speaking in unknown languages during her ecstasies; her advocates impute that as well as her other symptoms, to magic and sorcery, but this was only owing to their prejudices and their ignorance of the powers and operations of nature;

they might have been secretly afraid of her prophesy, but openly they would have treated her as an impostor; whereas I should have believed every word she had said, and never have suspected the reality of her uttering prophecies, only doubted their completion.

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ture, for it is evident from Hoffman, Forestus, and many of the most approved medical authors who have given several instances of it, that the gift of tongues is a natural symptom of nervous, convulsive, and ecstatic distempers. I know that it may easily be accounted for from the ordinary powers of the human mind in analogous cases, which are not reckoned at all miraculous; but this is not a proper place for such a dissertation, I will only say in general, that should a company of men and women be shut in a room fasting and praying for several nights together, I should not be at all surprized, if after they had fasted and prayed sufficiently long, they should begin to gabble together in unknown tongues, which neither themselves nor others understood, while of those that were present at the miracle, some should wonder, some should think them mad, and others drunk: But at the same time I must observe, that this remark cannot possibly be applied to that extraordinary effusion of tongues which happened to the apostles at the day of Pentecost; for it was promised them by our Lord himself; they expected it and were prepared to receive it; it was attended with miraculous circumstances;



Such a story as I have been imagining, would have been agreeable to nature and her operations ; and unless she had been an entranced visionary the whole time, which her own account, and the symptoms observed upon her when she came to London, shew was not the case, I must always think it impossible that she could have survived so long a fast, far less walked twelve miles after it. The present story is the most inconsistent I ever met with, and has nothing to support it, but that Devil of credulity, which has entered into Fielding and his adherents.

This girl's elopement and absence, has occasioned a great noise, and it may not

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stances ; such as a mighty rushing wind from heaven, and cloven tongues of fire sat upon their heads all the time ; besides, they continued uniformly possessed of this truly miraculous talent ever after, and employed it successfully in propagating the gospel amongst nations of different languages : At least this is the received opinion amongst all orthodox christian divines, but how far it has its foundation in the holy scriptures, as I never examined into it, I cannot pretend to say.

be amiss to enquire into the most probable reasons of it. Dr. Hill informs the world, that she has nothing marketable about her, but according to the Poet,

*There swims no goose so grey, but soon or late,  
Will find some gentle gander for her mate.*

When the veracity of this grey goose was first suspected, the readiest and most natural supposition was, that she had been the whole time engaged in love's soft dalliance, with some gentle gander her mate; but Justice Fielding knocked this report on the head at once, by observing, that the goose went out as plump as a partridge, and came back as lean as a rake; and he adds, that of all the barbarities and cruelties, which ganders have inflicted upon geese, starving them would be the last; and no doubt, he who has writ so many romances, and knows so much of the private transactions betwixt ganders and geese, must be reckoned a good judge. The next report was, that her absence, and the condition in which she returned

turned, had been owing to a salivation; this Dr. Dodd confesses accounts for all the symptoms but one, which out of ignorance he excepts; but still he calls it a malicious and a scandalous report, though he gives no reason for it. I must own, though it does not seem to want a foundation in nature, that I think it entirely false, because no reason can be assigned for this young virgin's undergoing a mercurial course, but her being infected with the venereal disease, and that too to a very high degree. For however the ignorance or interest of surgeons, may make them disguise the truth, it is certain, that the virulence of this malady is prodigiously abated, in comparison of what it was some years ago; that it is daily losing strength, and will in a short time entirely disappear: It may likewise be added with equal truth, that of the many thousand unhappy young people, who yearly go through the miseries of a high salivation in this populous and licentious city, perhaps there is not one in ten of them, but what might be cured with the simplest



simplest external applications, without so much as swallowing a pill, or taking a dose of physick; and that in those, who are tainted to the greatest degree, a salivation at all, far less a high one, though perhaps the speediest is never the safest, nor even the most certain method of cure. Were the surgeons content with only draining the the pockets of their patients, they would not be so much to blame, but to ruin their constitutions at the same time, is altogether inexcusable: The misfortune indeed is, that with any regard to their character, or appearance of conscience in their bills, they cannot do the one, without doing the other first place.

IF then our young lady had been in such a situation, if her juices had been so vitiated, and her mass of blood so tainted, as to render a mercurial course absolutely necessary, she could not have been in so hearty and sanguine a state, or had so florid a countenance, as her surgeon represents: Indeed had she put herself into his hands, or  
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the hands of some other as ignorant as him; it is possible a high salivation might have been her fate, though her symptoms had only been slight and external; and consequently that the condition in which she returned, might have been owing to that.

BUT upon seriously weighing, and comparing all the circumstances together, I cannot help thinking this report, though not entirely groundless, yet most probably false, especially as from Dr. Dodd's own account of the matter, it appears demonstrable that Miss at the time of her elopement must have laboured under another distemper rather more common amongst young ladies of her sobriety, reputed good character, and manner of life; in short, to keep the reader no longer in suspense, my real opinion is, that she was then with child, and had been so for at least five months before. No doubt the doctor and his adherents will think this report rather more scandalous and malicious than the first; scandalous indeed it is to her virginity, for virgins have long ago

ago given over bearing children, as well as Jupiter and Mars have given over begetting them ; how far it is malicious in me to raise it, let the world judge, after I have declared that having never drank chocolate at White's, or tea with the justice and his wife, I never saw her there, or indeed any where else, so she has had no opportunity of inflaming my malice against her, by threatening to swear her child upon me, as she has done the robbery upon Mary Squires, both which I believe she might have done with equal justice : But whether it be malicious or not, the doctor can only blame himself for having given rise to it ; indeed both Miss and her champion seem to be equally simple and silly, the one for telling a certain circumstance, and the other for publishing it ; for they must not think that all mankind are as ignorant and credulous as their friends at the chocolate house, or their mob at the Old Bailey. In page 14, of the physical account we are told, that Miss CANNING " for the five preceding months had had the common female benefit totally obstructed,



and that this happened by reason of her sleeping great part of a night in a damp stone kitchen." It is now granted on both sides, that the benefit, as our surgeon quaintly and modestly calls it, had been totally obstructed for so long. Let us next enquire, what could most probably have been the cause of it; and we shall soon discover, that it could not possibly be that which the surgeon, or rather the young lady herself has assigned: I will not deny indeed, that catching cold, or sleeping in a damp place, may occasion an obstruction of the benefit, if it happens near, or during the time of the eruption; but then a morbid suppression from such a cause, and continuing so long, infallibly brings on the most terrible and alarming symptoms, which can never be cured till the cause is removed; and if that cannot be done, end at last in death itself. This is a fact so notorious, that it is needless either to attempt to prove, or give any examples of it; none could be ignorant of it, but a navy surgeon; which Mr. Dodd appears to have been. One very

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frequent consequence of this obstruction, is the epilepsy, as is evident to all, who are ever so little conversant in medical observations: If then a person before healthy, may become subject to the falling sickness on this account, it is plain, that one naturally liable to it before, would be afterwards more afflicted with it than ever; but this was not the case with Miss CANNING, otherwise we should certainly have heard of it. But were we to lay no stress on this observation, an undeniable and never-failing consequence of this obstruction, is the Chlorosis, or green-sickness, the symptoms and appearances of which are too well known to require a description; it is sufficient to observe, that they are absolutely inconsistent. and utterly incompatible with that hearty and sanguine habit of body, and florid countenance, which it is confessed our young lady enjoyed at the time of her elopement.

WE have now discovered one certain truth, that the five months suppression of  
Miss

MISS CANNING's female benefit, could not possibly be owing to the cause assigned, or indeed any other morbid cause whatsoever. This will naturally lead us to the real one, and of course to the unravelling and detecting this whole imposture, and mystery of the blackest iniquity and villainy.

PHYSICIANS unanimously agree in recommending to chlorotic girls, as the last and Herculean remedy for that distemper, matrimony, at least the duties and comforts of it. Justice Fielding very well knows that there are a great many young ladies in this city, who take care never to be subject to that malady, while there is a temporary husband to be had, or a man to be picked up in the streets: I will not say that MISS CANNING is just one of these, the contrary appears from the universal good character she had acquired in the neighbourhood; but we may very reasonably suppose that MISS being a little pale in the complexion, and wan under the eyes, might accidentally meet in a convenient place with a young, able, and



agreeable physician, who taking notice of her condition, might recommend an agreeable medicine to remove it : Though Miss is not pretty, yet she is young, and probably was then, what she is still supposed to be ; and all men know, that youth and innocence have native and resistless charms ; in a fit of innocence and simplicity, Miss might consent to have the medicine administered unto her, it might prove too agreeable, the dose might be too often repeated in ; short, a thousand things might happen, which might make this nostrum operate more successfully, than ever the doctor, or the patient intended it should, till at last, Miss found her benefit suppressed, and herself with child. Knowing the worst had now happened, it is to be supposed they gave a loose to dalliance and to joy, and took their fill of love's soft sport and wanton play : By these means Miss got rid of all her former complaints, and became a hearty girl, sanguine and of a florid countenance. This account to use Dr. Dodd's words

words, is agreeable to nature and her operations, and therefore to reason.

BUT alas, this pleasureable life could not forever last : Miss was now turning round in the waste, and the fulness of time was drawing near ; when she must lose her reputation for virtue, and the favour and countenance of her master, friends and neighbours : The larger share she possessed of all these, the greater reluctance would she feel in herself to part with them, the greater would her dread of shame be, and the more determined her resolution to prevent all bad consequences if possible. If common prostitutes procure abortions, it is for fear their being with child should spoil their occupation ; they are seldom known to murder their children, if once they are fairly brought forth, which other women frequently do, only because they have a character to lose ; and are therefore sensible of shame, which prostitutes are not : This is an observation that has been frequently made, and is verified by daily experience.

perience. Her friends have insisted much on Miss CANNING's good character, and it is therefore applicable to her in the strongest manner.

SHE was now above five, perhaps six months gone with child; her affairs were coming to a crisis, and what was to be done in this desperate exigence? She would most naturally consult her gallant, or rather her physician, who had so successfully removed her former complaints, to see if possibly he could relieve her from this. This ingenious gentleman probably was not able, certainly not willing, either to maintain his brat, or give security to the parish; therefore he would readily co-operate with his mistress, or it may be inspire her with the solution of procuring an abortion, as the only method to prevent all inconveniences.

PRIVATE lodgings would now be taken, certainly amongst people, to whom such things are familiar, who no doubt are to be found



found in this over-grown metropolis, where all manner of possible villainies are daily put in practice. In the course of her confinement, cash might run low, so our young lady's half guinea and her three shillings went for it, and it is to be supposed, her gown, hat and stays, were then pawned or sold; with robbing her of which she has charged the poor gipfy, and the two men, who according to the fable, carried her off in a fit. What infamous means were used to bring about this infamous end, I cannot pretend to say; one who has studied medicine as it is an agreeable and entertaining branch of natural philosophy, and only intends to apply the knowledge he has of it, to the detecting an infinite variety of impostures, which have prevailed, and wrought innumerable mischiefs in the world, both to the publick, and to private persons, amongst which I scruple not to affirm that this is one; I say it cannot be supposed that such a person, would purposely make himself acquainted with any of those infamous arts, by which abortions are to be procured: This I know  
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in general, that the same medicines avowedly given, and publickly recommended by physicians, to bring back obstructed benefits, will in larger and stronger doses, most commonly occasion abortions; I know likewise, that there are drugs in nature, and that villainy will invent and practice means, to bring about the latter infamous end, which no physician whatever, would make use of, for the former laudable and useful one; and it is to be feared, that these are not such secrets, even amongst the lowest vulgar, as it were to be wished.

I hope I shall therefore be excused, if from the symptoms observable on her at her return, I cannot pretend with any certainty to guess at the particular treatment this virtuous young lady met with during her confinement. This I will only say, that if violent drastic emmenagogue drugs were given her, after they had done their intended work, they would readily occasion a super-purgation, the natural and necessary effects of which are, weakness, faintness

ness of voice, low pulse, cold sweats, great consumption of body, heaviness of the head, swelling of the belly, and all the symptoms which were observable on her, when the dear creature returned to the longing arms of her fond mamma, the obstinate costiveness only excepted, which must be owing to their having given her large doses of opium, and violent astringents, in order to stop the fury of her evacuations. But be this as it will, it is certain, that an abortion at any rate, especially an artificial one, is always more dangerous, and attended with worse consequences, than even child-birth itself; so that it is no wonder she got back to her friends in such a piteous condition.

I shall now sum up the whole affair, in as few words as possible. The evidence which moved the jury to bring in the gipsy and her associate guilty, has been long destroyed, by the recantation of Virtue Hall; in which she still continues. Dr. Hill, in his account of the matter, has sufficiently shewn the glaring, and innumerable



merable contradictions, absurdities, and inconsistencies of the whole story itself. And I think it is here proved, that she could not possibly have subsisted so long in the garret, without being starved to death, and dying raving mad; which is the fate of all persons, who go out of the world in that manner; unless she had fallen into a series of prophetic visions and extasies, which by her symptoms at her return, and her own account of the matter, could not possibly have been her case. It is likewise proved, from her habit of body, at the time of her elopement, that the total suppression of her benefit, could not have been owing to any other cause whatever, but her being with child. It is certain, she was not so at her return, therefore, she must necessarily have been employed, during her confinement, in procuring an abortion; and it is proved besides, that the bad condition she was in when she came back, was the natural consequence of the infamous means, that were practised to get rid of her burthen, and that it could not possibly have been the effect

effect of starving. This I think is the most probable and natural solution, that has yet been given of this mystery; it is certain, that it accounts for every thing, and answers all the appearances, and I am fully persuaded, that it is the truth itself. I could have supported the physical reasoning, with a much greater variety of authorities and examples, but I thought it needless; however, I shall be ready to do it, whenever what I have here said is contradicted, by any physician or surgeon in great Britain, Dr Dodd only excepted; which I believe is a case, that will never happen.

Whether our illustrious and perpetual virgin, has got her common female benefit totally obstructed a second time, and is again with child, I cannot pretend to say; if she is, she cannot be far gone, and we may comfort ourselves with this reflection, that some time must elapse, before she finds it necessary to make another elopement, and at her return to hatch another miraculous and impossible legend, which no doubt,

will raise as great disputes, differences and factions, as this has done; and set Justice Fielding, Dr. Dodd, her chocolate-house friends, and the Londoners in general, all as mad again, as ever they were.

IT now remains to make some general reflections on the fable itself, and the effects it has had. When Miss found herself in a condition to make her appearance, a fable was absolutely necessary to excuse her long absence to her dear mamma, her master, friends and neighbours, to prevent all suspicions, about the manner in which she had been employed; and it was found not inconvenient to contrive it so, that they might entertain a higher opinion of her virtue and chastity, than ever they had done before: The story that was hatched, served all these purposes most admirably, as the event has shewn; and has been productive of greater consequences, than the original inventors intended it should, or even could have wished. For the success that this imposture has met with, as well as  
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most others of the same kind, has been rather owing to a fortuitous concurrence of events favouring it, and to the immense folly, credulity, and ignorance of the bulk of mankind, ever ready to be imposed on, than to any preconcerted plan, scheme or design. This is a curious observation, and I could evince the truth of it, by a variety of much more interesting instances than this: So that in justice, I must acquit the lady-mother of our young virgin, of all share in the plot; which Dr. Hill seems to lay to her charge: At the same time, this gentleman has fully proved, that Miss had never been at Enfield Wash, till she went there with her posse, to apprehend the gipsy and her adherents. But she might have received what information she had, which was far from being exact, from her gallant, who might have been there, and probably stood in the same relation to Virtue Hall, or even to the gipsy herself; for he does not seem to be an over nice gentleman, either in his amours, or his morals.

Dr.

Dr. Dodd very justly calls this a not contemptible story; and indeed if it be considered in a political view, I must always honour the contriver of it, whoever he was: Had he lived in a country and an age when new religions and revelations were in fashion, he must have been a dangerous member of society; he seems indeed to be a thorough artist in deception, and to be a perfect master of the best methods of imposing on the bulk of mankind; he certainly understands to a nicety, the great secret and mystery of imposture, and that is, to publish a story, which the more absurd, inconsistent and improbable it may be, provided it keeps within the bounds of what the bulk of mankind think barely possible, is always sure of success, in the same proportion that it tends to raise and inflame their passions, their wonder, pity, compassion and indignation: If he succeeds in this, the business is done, he has nothing now to do but to lie still, or if he acts at all, to direct the thunderbolt aright, and rather check their fury than impel them on. Men of sense

sense always neglect such stories too much at first, they think them below their notice, or that they will soon evaporate of themselves, but sad experience has shewn this to be a vulgar mistake; on the contrary they are soon firmly established; *vires acquirunt eundo*, they become venerable through age, and acquire a prescriptive title to truth, which never fails to be made use of, as soon as they are called in question; if they happen to be of the religious kind, an end at once is put to all humanity and brotherly love amongst men, and those who out of generous principles would willingly detect the imposture, and open the eyes of their fellow-creatures, are sure to be reviled and evil-intreated, perhaps finally confuted with the unanswerable syllogisms of fire and faggot; if they should begin early to disturb the public quiet, or attack the lives and characters of innocent persons, as happened in this case, the civil magistrate may soon take notice of them, and endeavour to detect the imposture, yet a thousand accidents arising from the nature of the thing, may

render



render all his attempts unsuccessful ; and though the improbability of the story itself should be fully displayed, and laid open, yet those whom it has deceived, either may not see it, or if they should, make that very improbability the strongest argument for its truth ; which has been Justice Fielding's method in this case, as appears from his pamphlet on the subject.

BUT truth and probability will at the long run always prevail over their opposites, and particularly in a legend like this, where there can be no rooted educational prejudices, (as we are not quite so mad as our ancestors, to make every foolish and miraculous story hatched and believed amongst a few brainfick enthusiasts, the foundation of a new, or a part of the old religious system,) will be soon universally exploded, and men will begin to wonder how they have suffered themselves to be so grossly deceived ; but credulity is frequently a passion, and being nursed up and cherished by other passions, such as admiration, pity, &c. falls

falls itself of course, as soon as these its supporters give way. If the story which this little wretch told when she came home, be considered in this view, it will be found to be most admirably contrived : Her so gallantly rejecting the gipsy's proffers of fine cloaths, gave mankind an high opinion of her chastity and virtue, and thus she acquired their esteem and regard ; her miraculous fasting, her escape and sufferings afterwards, all concurred to inspire them with wonder and admiration at the affair in general, with pity and compassion for the little wench herself, and wrath and indignation against the supposed authors of her miseries : Thus all their passions were at once so much engaged, that they had neither time nor leisure to examine, whether the story that raised them was probable, or even possible, but they took every thing that ELIZABETH said, for granted ; advertisements were published ; subscriptions were raised ; prosecutions were begun ; and the poor gipsy was condemned to be hanged ; hitherto indeed she has been kept alive by the merciful exertion of his

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majesty's prerogative, but the sentence still remains in force against her ; and our young lady being now finally acquitted of all charge of perjury, the Canningan faith seems to be supported on a legal establishment ; and thus imposture has all the advantages it could ever desire over truth. But time I hope will soon discover, that truth will at last prevail over this, as well as every other imposture that ever existed, and is not as yet detected.

THE event has shewn how well this whole legend was adapted to the gross intellects of the bulk of mankind in general, from the gay young ones, young in understanding at least, who play at cards and drink chocolate at White's, to the promiscuous rabble who pelted the gipsy's witnesses at the Old Bailey. The behaviour of such people indeed, who are generally governed by whim and caprice, is not much to be wondered at ; but I cannot help being surprized at the conduct of Justice Fielding in this affair, a man of undoubted good sense, sagacity and penetration, and who from  
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his witty and humorous writings, appears to be thoroughly versed in all the deceits and weakneses of the human heart; he must, or should have known, that the greater this girl's silliness or simplicity was, the more easily she might impose upon herself, and after she had sworn and asserted her story so often, the more difficult it would be to puzzle and confound her in it; and the less suspicious he might be of her intention or ability to deceive him, with the greater facility she could do it.

I shall now lay down some few reflections on the issue that this affair is already come to. The gipsy has been twice reprieved, and will hardly now suffer; all further enquiries are now stopt as I suppose, by the verdict of the grand jury; and Miss CANNING will now peaceably enjoy all the good consequences of her obstructed benefit: Thus villainy is rewarded, and innocence punished. If that villainy be so deep as I imagine it is, it is not to be thought it will ever be detected by human testimony, con-

frequently innocence will never be cleared up to the satisfaction of all men ; so the whole affair will still remain in some degree a mystery. Of course, if we act as prudent and rational men, we should rather consider the probability or improbability of the events themselves, than the testimony by which they are supported or overthrown ; and if that be done with candour, it will be found that the truth or falsehood of the story itself, ought to make no alteration in the opinions we should entertain of the conduct of the two different parties : That is, supposing Miss CANNING's story as true, as I believe it false, the conduct of her friends and champions, is nevertheless highly blameable and ridiculous, and that of the lord mayor still commendable and praise-worthy, for he thought and acted according to probability, and the others contrary to all rules of it ; the one was guided by reason, the others driven by passion. Probability and improbability depend not more on the circumstances of the facts themselves, than of the persons to whom they are related. The more ignorant

rant people are, that is to say, the less they know of the extent of the powers of nature, were they to act reasonably, they ought to be the more incredulous, and with the greater difficulty grant their assent to any seemingly miraculous story; but the direct contrary of this, is always observed to be true, and is an observation that cannot be too much attended to.

THE powers of nature extend prodigiously far in most cases; what appears miraculous to the vulgar, a philosopher, knows is nothing but one of her ordinary operations; no man would incline to extend the powers of nature farther than myself, but then I know they must have their bounds, and I have rejected CANNING's story, because it appears to transgress those bounds. If it is true, then the powers of nature must extend farther than ever I thought they did; but whether it be true or false, I know this, that the extent of human credulity is prodigious, or rather infinite, that properly speaking it has no bounds, and that there  
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is no story so monstrously absurd, so palpably ridiculous, or apparently impossible, but what the bulk of men may swallow and digest, venture their lives in defending, and die asserting the truth of it: And at the same time, no fable so trivial and inconsiderable in itself, but what the immense folly, ignorance, and credulity of men, may render, not only of the last consequence to themselves, but to all their posterity. From this vague, and undetermined knowledge men have of the powers of nature, and from the prodigious and almost infinite extent of their credulity, several consequences might be drawn, which are very obvious; but I do not chuse to insist on them at present: I shall only say in general, that until certain bounds and limits be set to both, we can never form any opinions, much to be depended on, with respect to several matters, which all men allow to be of the last importance.

I shall just make one or two reflections more, and then conclude. If this Miss

CANNING

CANNING, has been a deceiver, which I am persuaded, all sensible men reckon the most probable opinion; it may be seen, that an imposture may be so cunningly contrived, or attended with such circumstances, as to baffle and elude, all the vigilance, sagacity, and penetration of a wise, and worthy magistrate, who wanted neither inclination, power, nor opportunity, to discover and detect it. What then is to be said of other stories, with equal justice suspected of imposture, which were reckoned too insignificant at first to be enquired into, but, when afterwards they became of importance, and men would have willingly detected them, they found that the opportunity was gone, the means were lost, and the records and monuments destroyed, which would have been most subservient for that purpose? The champions of this young thing, represent her to be so simple and silly, that one would suspect her to be a *child of light*; if then she is an impostor, it must be granted, that the *children of light*, can now and then deceive, and are sometimes

sometimes *wiser in their generation, than the children of this world*. On the other hand, if we suppose that it is all a truth, yet its most zealous champions must confess, that in this case, truth has been proposed to the world, with all the appearances of falsehood and imposture imaginable, and has been attended with all the absurdities, inconsistencies, and improbabilities, that can well be collected in one story together; at the same time, they ought to reflect, that this truth has been as successful, as even an impostor could wish it; for the enemies of our young lady are both in confinement, and one of them under sentence of death, from which she can only escape, by the gracious extension of our sovereign's prerogative; and that the virgin herself, is now no longer *militant, but triumphant*; that she is honoured and respected, and has got money in her pocket; and if she gets a benefit night at each playhouse, will soon get more; in short, that *that is good for her, she has been afflicted*, and that the obstruction of her common female benefit, has occasioned the opening  
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of an extraordinary pecuniary benefit un-  
 to her. I say ; let her champions be con-  
 tent with all these advantages, *let them be-  
 lieve, and hold fast* in the sublime, and in-  
 consistent mysteries of her virginity, and  
 her obstructed benefit, her fasting so mira-  
 culously, and escaping so wonderfully, with  
 a long train of *et cæteras* ; but let them not  
 forcibly impose the creed, upon those, who  
 have not that happiness of Canningan be-  
 belief, and facility of faith : Though old  
 Homer, has made it a poetical heresy, to  
 to call in question the chastity of Penelope ;  
 let them not make it a political one, to doubt  
 the virginity of ELIZABETH ; let them re-  
 vile, provided they do not persecute, and  
 while they are soaring up, and expatiating  
 at large, in the clear sunshine of mystical  
 intuition ; they may look down with superi-  
 or pity and contempt on those poor mortals,  
 who are still groveling in the dirt, and mire  
 of infidelity and scepticism.

I shall just make one observation more,  
 which when duly attended to, will be

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found of the last importance in life ; not only in keeping men from error, in discovering truth, and detecting falshood, but, in leading them to true and worthy notions of the supreme being ; and consequently, of religion and virtue, without the practice and exercise of which, there can be no real happiness in this life, or well founded hope in that which is to come. Human testimony in a thousand instances, as well as this, has been found erroneous, varying and fallacious ; whereas, the testimony of nature, is constant, uniform, and unvariable ; and whenever we think it otherwise, we shall always find it was owing to our ignorance of the powers of nature, and not to the inconstancy of nature herself. This is a fact, and reason will inform us that it is a necessary one ; human testimony, is the testimony of creatures finite and imperfect, influenced by passion, or swayed by interest, liable to be deceived themselves, or inclinable to deceive others ; but the testimony of nature, is the testimony of its author, of God himself ; a being infinitely per-

perfect and supreme, to whom no passion, no interest, can be imputed, unless it be to promote the good and happiness of his creatures; who cannot possibly be deceived himself, or contribute to the deception of others. When therefore, the testimony of nature, and human testimony, seem to contradict one another, we ought first to examine, whether that contradiction is apparent or real, if real, then the last ought to be entirely rejected, and to have no regard paid to it; if only apparent, then all the regard ought to be paid to human testimony, that it can demand from the nature of the events it relates, or the characters of the witnesses relating them. We can only know the characters of men, from their actions; in the same manner, we can only know the character of God, from his works; we must therefore study nature, which is the work of God, if we want to know what God is or what he would have us to be. The study of nature, therefore, and her philosophy, is the direct road to wisdom, virtue and religion; by such means, we should



should soon get rid of all the horrors of popular delusion, imposture and superstition, and should clearly perceive, it is not only our duty, but our interest, to become better, and more virtuous men, every day we live.

P O S T-

# POSTSCRIPT.

I T has happened a little unluckily for the author of this pamphlet, that it has not been published before the free pardon and deliverance of the gipsy, for in that case he might have had the credit of prophesying them, whereas now it may be said of him as well as of some other prophets, that he has pretended to foretell events after they came to pass; but the real truth is, as may be seen from the whole tenor of the work itself, that it was wrote some time ago, and entirely finished immediately after the verdict of the grand jury, This is a fact that can be proved, so that in justice his prophetic character, for any thing that has lately happened, ought to remain unimpaired: Indeed it may still be alledged that when he poured forth these prophetic passages, he was in the situation of Virgil's sibyl, and under a fit of the cataleptic ecstatic distemper, but as this is an assertion which

which he imagines will only gain credit with the wits and beaux esprits who frequent the chocolate-house, he does not think it worth his while to contradict it.

# F I N I S.

## E R R A T A.

In p. 22, l. 16. before the word *first*, insert *in the*.  
p. 30, l. 18. for *solution* read *resolution*.